

CLAIM OF BAHĀ'ULLĀH

PROPHETHOOD OR GODHOOD

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INTRODUCTION

Among the strongest arguments favoring the truthfulness of the Promised Messiah^{as}, and similarly of every Prophet and Messenger, is that a false Prophet or false claimant of receiving revelation from God is necessarily destroyed by the Divine Hand. If the Promised Messiah was, God forbid, a false Prophet, he would have been doomed and would never have been successful. To rebut this argument the opponents of Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at present the example of Mirza Husayn Ali Nuri, a.k.a. Bahā'ullāh, (1817-1892), who they say, falsely claimed Prophet-hood but was not destroyed by divine punishment, and that his religion continues to spread. Therefore, it is necessary that we examine the real claim of Bahā'ullāh, and see if he claimed to be a Prophet, or a Manifestation of God.

It is pertinent to mention that before Bahā'ullāh, Syed Ali Muhammad Shirazi (1819-1850), a.k.a. Bāb, made a claim of a divinely appointed person on May 23, 1844. In a little over six years, Bāb met the fate of false Prophets and was executed by a firing squad on July 9, 1850. Ironically, no opponent of Ahmadiyyat presents Bāb's example as a false prophet.

The Bahā'ī community presents Bahā'ullāh as a Prophet of God but the study of Bahā'ullāh's own writings reveal that his actual claim was that of being a "Manifestation of God". Though Bahā'īs call all the previous Prophets as manifestations of God, nonetheless, they believe that Bahā'ullāh's status and claim is unique and entirely different from the previous Prophets. The study of Bahā'ī literature reveals that Bahā'ullāh's claim is a complicated fusion of humanity and divinity, which not only confuses the common reader, but also his own followers. John Ebenezer

Esslemont (1874-1925), a prominent British Bahā'ī from Scotland, expresses this confusion of the continuous back and forth shift in Bahā'ullāh's claim from humanity to divinity and vice versa:

"In the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the utterance frequently changes from one of these forms to another. Sometimes it is evidently the man who is discoursing, then without a break the writing continues as if God were speaking in the first person. Even when speaking as a man, however, Bahá'u'lláh speaks as God's messenger, as a living example of entire devotion to God's will. His whole life is actuated by the Holy Spirit. Hence no hard and fast line can be drawn between the human and divine elements in His life or teachings." (Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era by J.E. Esslemont P-94, Publisher Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, Fifth Revised paper edition, 1980)

However, later, in the same book, he stated that Bahā'ullāh declared his advent as the coming of God; under the title **'The Coming of the Lord'** he wrote:

*The "Coming of the Lord" in the "last days" is the one "far-off divine event" to which all the Prophets look forward, about which Their most glorious songs are sung. Now what is meant by the "Coming of the Lord"? Surely God is at all times with His creatures, in all, through all, and over all; "Closer is He than breathing, nearer than hands and feet." Yes, but men cannot see or hear God immanent and transcendent, cannot realize His Presence, until He reveals Himself through a visible form and talks to them in human language. For the revelation of His higher attributes, God has always made use of a human instrument. Each of the Prophets was a mediator through whom God visited and spoke to His people. Jesus was such a mediator, and the Christians have rightly regarded His appearance as a coming of God. In Him they saw the Face of God and through His lips they heard the Voice of God. **Bahá'u'lláh tells us that the "Coming" of the Lord of Hosts, the Everlasting Father, the Maker and Redeemer of the World, which, according to all the Prophets, is to take place at "the time of the end," means no other than His manifestation in a human temple, as He manifested through the temple of Jesus of Nazareth, only this time with a fuller***

and more glorious revelation, for which Jesus and all the former Prophets came to prepare men's hearts and minds.(Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era by J.E. Esslemont P-405)

A DIALOGUE ON BAHĀ'Ī FAITH

Muhammad Abduhū, a famous Egyptian Muslim scholar and teacher in Al-Azhar University, had a soft spot for Bahā'ism. However, his student, Rashīd Rīdā, strictly opposed it. Their dialogue on Bahā'ism, published in an Arabic journal called Al-Manār,, was translated in English by Juan Ricardo Cole. In the introduction Cole stated that Rashīd Rīdā claimed that in meeting with him, Gulpā'ygānī, a Bahā'ī author and scholar, declared that he believe Bahā'ullāh to be God:

“Rida claims that Gulpā'ygānī once explained to him the Bahā'ī doctrine of Bahā'ullāh's divinity and ended by saying :He is God, there is no God but He” and by applying various names of God to Bahā'ullāh.” (Muhammad `Abduh and Rashīd Rīdā: A Dialogue on the Bahā'ī Faith-translation and introduction by Juan Ricardo Cole (World Order Vol.15, nos.3-4 (Spring/Summer 1981):7-16)-<http://www.h-net.org/bahai/diglib/articles/A-E/cole/abduh/abduh1.gif>)

THE ORIGIN

Unlike his so-called fore-runner, Bāb, Bahā'ullāh's original writings are available and reflect his actual claim. But, before we study his writings to ascertain his actual claim, let's trace back the origin and source of inspiration of his claim to divinity.

William McElwee Miller wrote in his book about the background of Bahā'ī faith:

Among the Shi'ites there have been various sects the members of which have not contented themselves with considering the Prophets and Imams as supernatural and sinless beings with miraculous powers, but have exalted them yet more highly, saying that they were emanations of Deity and manifestations of God. These sects (known as ghulat), which were rejected by the Twelvers as heretical, were usually characterized by certain cardinal doctrines, chiefly

Metempsychosis (tanasukh), Incarnation (hulul), and Return (rij'at) of individuals or types in successive cycles. From time to time in the history of Iran we find individuals putting forward the claim that they were the "return" of some previous prophet or imam, and were divine manifestations. One of these individuals who claimed to be God was al-Muqanna', "The Veiled Prophet of Khorasan," known to English readers through Moore's Lalla Rookh. He taught that the Deity had been manifested in all the prophets from Adam down, and had finally come to him. He was successful in gathering about him a great number of people who worshipped him and fought for him, till he and his followers miserably perished in 779 A.D. A half-century later Bābak made the same claim, and kept Iran in turmoil for twenty years, during which time he is said to have killed nearly a half-million people. At last he was captured and executed in 838 A.D. As Professor Browne remarks, "these doctrines (of Incarnation, Return, etc.) appear to be endemic in Persia, and always ready to become epidemic under suitable stimulus."

One of the more recent of these heretical sects to appear in Iran, one that was rejected and hated by the Twelvers, was that of the Shaykhis, the followers of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i, who died in 1826 A.D. The chief doctrines of this sect were the following:

- (1) Ali and the eleven Imams who followed him were divine beings;*
- (2) there must always exist among men on earth some person who is in direct supernatural communication with the Hidden Imam, and acts as the channel of grace between him and the Shi'ites; and*
- (3) there is no bodily Resurrection.*

Shaykh Ahmad was during his lifetime considered by his disciples to be the channel of grace between believers and the Hidden Imam, as was also his successor Sayyid Kazim of Resht. Both of these men were sometimes given the title Bāb (Gate), by which the first four intermediaries had been known. These Shaykhi teachers led their

disciples to expect in the near future the appearance of the Hidden Imam himself. Some traditions said that he would return after a thousand years, and, according to the Muslim calendar, the time was at hand. Thus Shi'ites of all sects were impatiently awaiting his manifestation.

When Sayyid Kazim died in 1843, his disciples were in doubt for some time as to whom they should turn for guidance. Soon two rival claimants for the leadership appeared, and the Shaykhi brotherhood was torn in two. One faction followed Hajji Karim Khan of Kirman, and continued to go by the name "Shaykhi." The other faction, which was the stronger, followed Sayyid Ali Muhammad of Shiraz, who adopted the title Bāb. Hence his followers became known as Bābis." ('BAHĀ'Ī FAITH, ITS TEACHINGS & HISTORY', chapter-1, "THE ISLAMIC BACKGROUND, PUBLISHED IN 1974 BY THE WILLIAM CAREY LIBRARY")

BĀB CALLED HIS PROMISED MANIFESTATION 'GOD'

As shown above, the Bahā'ī beliefs of divine manifestations are not innovative, but have deep roots in Iran's religious history. In this background, Bahā'īs claim that in the following Tablet, Bāb said the one, who will be made manifest after him is God, and while addressing him, he wrote:

*This is an epistle from this lowly servant to the All-Glorious Lord—He Who hath been aforetime and will be hereafter made manifest. Verily He is the Most Manifest, the Almighty. IN the name of the Sovereign Lord, the Lord of Power. Glorified is He before Whom all the dwellers of earth and heaven bow down in adoration and unto Whom all men turn in supplication. He is the One Who holdeth in His grasp the mighty kingdom of all created things and unto Him shall all return. He is the One Who revealeth whatsoever He willeth and by His injunction 'Be Thou' all things have come into being. **This is an epistle from the letter 'Thá' unto Him Who will be made manifest through the power of Truth—He Who is the All-Glorious, the Best Beloved—to affirm that all created things as well as myself bear witness for all time***

that there is none other God but Thee, the Omnipotent, the Self-Subsisting; that Thou art God, there is no God besides Thee and that all men shall be raised up to life through Thee. Lauded and glorified be Thy name, O Lord, my God!. A TABLET ADDRESSED TO 'HIM WHO WILL BE MADE MANIFEST' (<http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/tb/>)

If Bahā`ullāh, as Bahā'īs claim, is the one being addressed here, and he is the 'Manifestation' Bāb is talking about, then he has to be nothing less than a claimant of Godhood. However, If he was a Prophet, and not God, then obviously he is not the one addressed here by Bāb.

THE PROMISED ONE TO APPEAR BETWEEN 1511-2001 YEARS AFTER BĀB

An interesting point to note, although not related to Bahā`ullāh's claim, is that in a book Bab wrote called Bayān , he prophesied the coming of **"the One Whom God will make Manifest"** between 1511 and 2001 years after him:

اگر در عدد غیاث ظاهر شود و کل داخل شوند احدی داخل در نار نمی ماند، و اگر الی مستغاث رسد و کل داخل شوند احدی در نار نمی ماند الا آنکه کل مبدل نیودمی گردند. (الباب السابع عشر من الواحد الثاني. ص: 71)

"If He [whom God shall make Manifest] appears in the number of ghiyath (1511) and all enter therein, no one shall remain in fire. If it tarries till mustaghath (2011), all shall enter therein, no one shall remain in the fire, yet shall all be transformed into His Light." (Unit 2, Chapter 17, P: 71 of the Persian Bayan Tehran Azali Publication, 1946. Reprinted East Lansing, Mi: H_Baha'I, 1999)

والی امر محکم بیان که تا غیاث یا مستغاث شده درناریمانند چه کسی عالم بظهور نیست غیر الله هر وقت شود باید کل تصدیق بنقطه حقیقه نمایند و شکر الهی بجا آورند اگرچه امید از فضل اوست تا مستغاث برسد (الباب الخامس والعشر من الواحد الثالث ص: 100)

"No one knoweth [the time] of the manifestation other than God. Whenever it takes place, all must bear witness to its truth and gives thanks unto God, although by His grace it is hoped that He will appear till [the time of] mustaghath [2001] whereby the word of God may be raised high. And the proof is a sign, for His very bring proves Him, whilst He cannot be known by what is beneath His [level]. Glory be to God above what they attribute to Him." (Unit 3, Chapter- 15, P: 100 of the Persian Bayan. Tehran Azali Publication, 1946. Reprinted East Lansing, Mi: H_Baha'I, 1999)

However, quite contrary to the above, Bahā`ullāh claimed in April 1863, within nineteen years of the declaration of Bāb, that he is the promised one foretold by the Bāb.

NO INTERPRETATION IS ALLOWED

In the introductory chapter of the 'Kitab-e-Aqdas' published by the Universal House of Justice, it is mentioned that this book is the revelation of the author by himself.

"the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, revealed from first to last by the Author of the Dispensation Himself" (A Description Of The Kitáb-I-Aqdas By Shoghi Effendi Taken From God Passes By, His History Of The First Bahá'í Century)

In this self-revealed book, Bahā`ullāh says that interpretation of his revealed words is not allowed, which must be taken literally, and their meanings cannot be altered:

"37...Whosoever interpreteth this verse otherwise than its obvious meaning is deprived of the Spirit of God and of His mercy which encompasseth all created things..."

"105 Whoso interpreteth what hath been sent down from the heaven of Revelation, and altereth its evident meaning, he, verily, is of them that have perverted the Sublime Word of God, and is of the lost ones in the Lucid Book."

Therefore, in the following excerpts from his writings, we have to take his claims literally without interpreting or altering their meanings.

IN MY NAME

*"In My Name, calling aloud in the Kingdom of Utterance - PRAISE and thanksgiving beseem the **Lord of manifest dominion Who hath adorned the mighty prison**" (LAWH-I-DUNYÁ (Tablet of the World)*

EXCERPTS FROM 'EPISTLE TO THE SON OF THE WOLF':

"Either thou or someone else hath said:"Let the Surih of Tawhid be translated, so that all may know and be fully persuaded that the one

true God begetteth not, nor is He begotten. Moreover, the Bābis believe in his (Bahā`ullāh's) Divinity and Godhood.” (Epistle to the Son of the Wolf – P: 18)

“Men have failed to perceive Our purpose in the reference We have made to Divinity and Godhood. Were they to apprehend it, they would arise from their places, and cry out: “We, verily, ask pardon of God!” The Seal of the Prophets—may the souls of all else but Him be offered up for His sake—saith: “Manifold are Our relationships with God. At one time, We are He Himself, and He is We Ourselves. At another He is that He is, and We are that We are.” (Epistle to the Son of the Wolf –P-18, 19)

“And further We have said:”He Who is the Father is come, and the Son (Jesus Christ), in the holy vale, crieth out: Here am I, here am I, O Lord, my God...Be thou not of them who called upon God by one of His names, but who, when He Who is the Object of all names appeared, denied Him and turned aside from Him, and, in the end, pronounced sentence against Him with manifest injustice.” (Epistle to the Son of the Wolf –P-24)

“O Queen in London! Incline thine ear unto the voice of thy Lord, the Lord of all mankind, calling from the Divine Lote-Tree: Verily, no God is there but Me, the Almighty, the All-Wise! Cast away all that is on earth, and attire the head of thy kingdom with the crown of remembrance of Thy Lord, the All-Glorious. He, in truth, hath come unto the world in His most great glory, and all that hath been mentioned in the Gospel hath been fulfilled. The land of Syria hath been honored by the footsteps of its Lord, the Lord of all men...” (Epistle to the Son of the Wolf –P-24, 25)

THE HOLY PROPHET MUHAMMAD^{SA} IS THE ‘LAST’ PROPHET

Dr. Sabir Afaqi states in his book, ‘Proofs From The Holy Qur’án Regarding The Advent Of Bahá'u'lláh’, (Mir’at Publication P O Box 4273 New Delhi-48 India, 2nd Edition April-1999), that the ‘Prophetic period’ has ended with the Holy Prophet Muhammad^{SA}, and with the advent of Bahā`ullāh a new period of Manifestation of God has started:

"The period from Adam to Prophet Muhammad is called 'Dur-i-Nabuvvat', i.e. the Prophetic Cycle. God has taken a promise from each of the Prophets of that cycle that when at the end of the Prophetic Cycle the Greatest of the Manifestations of God appears, their nations should believe in Him. By His advent a new Age will begin and He will confirm the Books of the past. Thus an oath has been taken from all the Prophets to accept Bahá'u'lláh and their followers have been commissioned to believe in Him and teach His Cause and assist Him." (P-91,92)

*"All the Prophets of God (Nabi) have prophesied the coming of Bahá'u'lláh. **Muhammad was the last of those Prophets.** God declares that no more 'Nabi' will appear after Muhammad as He is the 'Seal' of them. But now the 'great news' (Nabá'i-'Azim) will be made manifest. Muhammad was the last 'Nabi' to give the glad tidings of 'a Message Supreme...' (P-111)*

"THE EARTH WILL BE FILLED WITH THE LIGHT OF GOD (BAHÁ'U'LLÁH):

In the above book he applied the Qur`anic description of 'Coming of God' and 'Filling the Earth with the Light of God' upon the advent of Bahá'ullāh:

"In this verse, [And the earth will shine with the glory of its Lord...39:69] the advent of Bahá'u'lláh (Glory of Lord), the revelation of a new Book presence of witnesses an pronouncement of the judgment, have been foretold. Therefore today the world is shining by the light of the advent of Bahá'u'lláh. He has revealed more than hundred volumes of Words of God including His Book of Laws, The Most Holy Book -- Kitáb-i-Aqdas. All the former Prophets bear witness to the validity of the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh. He has judged between all the nations and removed the causes of differences between them. Today, all the nations are being gathered together under one single tent of unity." (P-113)

"From Adam till Muhammad was a Prophetic Cycle. The Holy city of Mecca had a central importance during that Cycle because of the Ka`bih which was a centre of all activities. Muhammad was the last One in the series of the Prophets in this Cycle...Baha`ullah has

inaugurated a new cycle of God and opened a new era of history. (P-151)

CONCLUSION

The above passages show beyond a shadow of a doubt that Bahā`ullāh claimed not to be a Prophet but God revealing his own words. There is no punishment mentioned in the Holy Qur`an for such claimants, because the absurdity of such a claim is so obvious that even the followers of such claimants of divinity have to interpret it against the commandment of their leaders.